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TO: United State House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and  
Emergency Management

FROM: Janice R. Kilgore, CEM, Director,  
Department of Public Safety  
Escambia County, Florida

RE: Hearing October 6, 2005, entitled: "Recovering after Katrina: Ensuring  
that FEMA is up to the task."

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members it is an honor to be with you today.

I have served in the areas of public safety and emergency management in Escambia County, (Pensacola) Florida, for the past 32 years and offer the following comments based on recent experiences.

Disaster response may begin at the local government level but it requires a commitment from all levels of government as well as private and non-profit agencies to adequately recover from these events. FEMA, as the lead agency for federal assistance, must be able to:

- provide resources in a timely manner
- communicate effectively with response agencies
- provide consistent direction
- improve annual funding of emergency management programs

On September 16, 2004, Hurricane Ivan came ashore near the Alabama-Florida line as a category 3 hurricane. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> storm to affect the State of Florida in just over one month. Though resources were already stretched thin, in less than 48 hours of landfall, citizens in our County were receiving food, water and MREs. Many agencies came to our aid, including representatives from Gulfport (Harrison County), Mississippi. When Katrina recently made landfall along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, it was our turn to help.

On August 30<sup>th</sup>, the afternoon following Katrina’s landfall, a multi-discipline team from Escambia County responded to Gulfport to assist our Mississippi neighbors. We maintained this presence until September 29, 2005. Early reports from our team were of the extreme devastation and the tremendous need for basic supplies and assistance. There were immediate requests for tetanus and first aid supplies. We located over 700 units of tetanus and sent boxes of bandaids, antibiotic ointment and peroxide to the area. Escambia County personnel distributed food and water from their own supplies to people in the community who had nothing. Over the next several days, our employees discovered community after community in need of assistance.

Katrina caused catastrophic damage and any community would be overwhelmed after such a disaster. That is why FEMA must be poised to provide a quick response following major disasters. The larger the event and the greater the population affected, the more immediate the need will be to provide basic supplies, personnel and equipment.

Communication and coordination with response and recovery agencies before a disaster strikes is crucial. The old saying “you play like you practice” rings true during activations of Emergency Operations Centers. Local governments do all they can when a major disaster occurs but they are victims and in need of immediate assistance. This is not a time for politics or turf wars. Thankfully, churches, businesses and individuals provide help until government resources arrive.

Consistency is so important. After Hurricane Ivan, the Public Safety Resource Manager had to revise FEMA forms three different times because of conflicting instructions received from different FEMA representatives. It was not uncommon to receive approval on a project from one FEMA employee, only to have it rejected by another FEMA employee. FEMA must improve consistency. All FEMA employees and reservists must be properly trained before being deployed.

We receive advance warning before a hurricane, but that is not true of other disasters. Local governments must develop plans, conduct training and provide initial response to all disasters. To assist in this effort, State and Federal governments should increase funding specific to emergency management activities. In the fiscal year that just ended (04/05) Escambia County’s share of FEMA’s emergency management funding was only \$47,222. This was \$43.00 less than the prior year (03/04) and \$82.00 less than the year before that (02/03). Funding levels should be increasing not decreasing if we are going to build an adequate emergency management response in this Country.

In summary, FEMA has been a vital part of response and recovery activities for many years. With a renewed emphasis on qualified and trained personnel, consistent instruction, and improved coordination; FEMA should be able to effectively carry out the mission it was created to perform.